

Arnett J. Brown Jr., head of union representing school principals, dies

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Arnett J. Brown Jr., the president of the public school principals' union in Baltimore, died yesterday of cancer at Baltimore County General Hospital in Randallstown.

Mr. Brown, who was 62, was a native of Baltimore and had worked for the Baltimore school system since graduating from Coppin College in 1950. He thought of himself as someone who came up through the "old school," and he was one of those veterans who never lost sight of his main job: promoting the welfare of his students.

A large man with a booming voice that could nevertheless rise to a high pitch when just the right note of incredulity was required, he had a special knack for turning a phrase -- particularly when his union was in the midst of contract negotiations.

A common theme was the failings of the management staff in the central office.

"You are about the business of making an educational desert of our school system," he once declared at a school board meeting. His was the kind of blunt language that is rarely heard in such forums.

Yet Mr. Brown became a staunch defender of Superintendent Richard C. Hunter when Dr. Hunter came under fire from critics outside the school system, and Mr. Brown's union -- the Public School Administrators and Supervisors Association -- never proved to be intractable over major issues.

It offered no more than a token objection in 1989 when Dr. Hunter reassigned and demoted many of its members working at the North Avenue headquarters.

And when Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke summoned Baltimore's principal corps to City Hall to demand that they take responsibility for improving their schools, Mr. Brown was irritated and tried to play down the importance of the meetings, but ultimately he went along.

Mr. Brown was principal at Cherry Hill Middle School, which serves the residents of the public housing project on the south bank of the Middle Branch. He brought to the school order, discipline, and, many believed, a sense of purpose.

A graduate of Frederick Douglass High School and Coppin, he took his first teaching job at Luther Craven Mitchell Primary Elementary School in East Baltimore in September 1950. He received a master's degree

from [Syracuse University](#) in 1964 and was made an assistant principal in 1971. In 1972 he was appointed principal of the Alicia Crossland School, located in what is now the system's headquarters building. He transferred to what was then Cherry Hill Junior High in 1976.

He was serving his third term as president of the union.

"He was very much a friend to the superintendent and the school system, although he represented his association very well," said Douglas J. Neilson, the system's head of public relations.

Mr. Brown was a member of Sharon Baptist Church, Phi Delta Kappa, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Outside school hours, he was fond of building models, clocks, dollhouses and other crafts, and also had an interest in photography.

He and his wife, the former Marcia Parks, were married in 1969 and lived in Forest Park.

Besides Mrs. Brown, he is survived by his mother, Virginia L. Brown; a sister, Elaine Brown Page; three daughters, Dawn E. Brown, Arnetta V. Brown and Lauren M. Brown; a son, Arnett J. Brown III; and a granddaughter. All are of Baltimore.

The funeral will be held at noon Thursday at Sharon Baptist Church, at Presstman and Stricker streets.

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